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SIPDIS

FOR EUR/PPD MHARALAMBAKIS AND MHURLEY; EUR/NCE
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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON DEATH OF SLOVAK SOLDIERS IN
IRAQ

1. THE DEATH OF THREE SOLDIERS IN IRAQ ON JUNE 8 HAS
PROMPTED CONSIDERABLE MEDIA REACTION IN SLOVAKIA, MOST
OF WHICH SUPPORTS THE CONTINUING PRESENCE OF THE SLOVAK
TEAM IN IRAQ.

2. SME: ON JUNE 9 AND 10, THE SME ONLINE VERSION CHAT
(CENTER RIGHT INDEPENDENT PAPER RELIED UPON BY
INTELLECTUALS AND YOUNG PEOPLE) IS FAVORABLE TO
SOLDIERS REMAINING ON DUTY, POINTING OUT THAT SLOVAK
SOLDIERS GO TO IRAQ VOLUNTARILY, ARE PAID WELL FOR THIS
DUTY AND SHOULD MAKE A REASONED ASSESSMENT ABOUT THE
DANGERS INVOLVED. THE CHAT IS NOT ANTI-AMERICAN.
NEGATIVE READERS BLAME THE SLOVAK GOVERNMENT AND NOT
THE U.S. CONCERNING SLOVAKIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN IRAQ.
JUNE 9 COVERAGE IN SME INCLUDED A COLUMN BY PETER
SCHUTZ DESCRIBING THE DEATHS AS AN UNFORTUNATE ACCIDENT
THAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED DURING MILITARY DUTY IN
SLOVAKIA. SCHUTZ CRITICIZES SLOVAK GOVERNMENT
REPRESENTATIVES FROM SMER AND SNS FOR THEIR NEGATIVE
STANCE. IN HIS OPINION, IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO BRING
THE SOLDIERS BACK FROM IRAQ.

2. NOVY CAS: NOVY CAS, THE WIDEST CIRCULATION PAPER
IN SLOVAKIA AND A TABLOID, OFFERS AN ON-LINE
QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT WHETHER TO WITHDRAW SLOVAK SOLDIERS
FROM IRAQ. THE MAJORITY OF RESPONSES FAVOR SOLDIERS
REMAINING IN IRAQ. AN ARTICLE ON JUNE 9 CALLED "I WILL
SHOOT DZURINDA" EXPLAINS THAT AN EMPLOYEE UNDER THE
AUSPICES OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION THREATENED TO
SHOOT THE PRIME MINISTER. A COLUMN BY VLADIMIR DONNER
ON JUNE 9 CRITICIZES THE SLOVAK GOVERNMENT AND CALLS
FOR TROOP WITHDRAWAL.

3. CENTER LEFT DAILY PRAVDA OFFERS COPIOUS CHAT
REACTIONS IN THE ONLINE VERSION. SOME ASSESS THE
SOLDIERS NOT AS HEROES BUT AS PEOPLE WHO WENT TO IRAQ
FOR MONEY. MANY EXPRESS CONDOLENCES. FEW BLAME AMERICA
FOR THE DEATHS. SEVERAL CRITICIZE THE SLOVAK
GOVERNMENT, MOSTLY PRIME MINISTER DZURINDA FOR SENDING
THE SLOVAK ARMY TO IRAQ. A JUNE 9 PRAVDA COLUMN BY
LUBOS PALATA DESCRIBES SLOVAK SOLDIERS AS HEROES WHO
DIED FOR A GOOD CAUSE.

4. NARODNA OBRODA: INDEPENDENT DAILY NARODNA OBRODA
WITH TIES TO ANO OFFERED COMMENTARY JUNE 9 DESCRIBING
THE DEATHS AS ACCIDENTAL AND BLAMING NEITHER THE SLOVAK
NOR THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT.

5. TV MARKIZA: ON PRIME TIME NEWS JUNE 9, MOST WIDELY
WATCHED SLOVAK STATION TV MARKIZA REPORTED ABOUT THE
DEATH OF THREE SLOVAK SOLDIERS IN IRAQ, MENTIONING THE
POSSIBILITY THAT THE DEATHS WERE DUE TO AN ATTACK. THE
TV NOTED THAT BOTH COALITION AND OPPOSITION LEADERS
SENT CONDOLENCE LETTERS TO THE FAMILIES OF THE
DECEASED. PRIME MINISTER DZURINDA POINTED OUT,
"TODAY'S TRAGEDY SHOULDN'T DISPUTE OUR PRESENCE IN
IRAQ." MR. FICO STATED THAT ONLY PROFOUND RESPECT FOR
THE KILLED SOLDIERS AND THEIR FAMILIES STOPS HIM FROM
SAYING MORE.

6. SLOVAK NATION TV: ON JUNE 9 NEWS, A POLISH
GENERAL SAID THAT THE DEATHS MAY HAVE BEEN DUE TO AN
ATTACK. POLISH AND U.S. OFFICIAL CONDOLENCE LETTERS
WERE NOTED. PRESIDENT SCHUSTER COMMENTED THAT THIS
ACCIDENT SHOULD NOT HAVE AN IMPACT ON SLOVAKIA'S
PRESENCE IN IRAQ." PARLIAMENTARIANS HRUSOVSKY AND
BUGAR ALSO COMMENTED THAT A LINK SHOULD NOT BE CREATED
TO QUESTION SLOVAKIA'S PRESENCE IN IRAQ, AS SUCH AN
ACCIDENT COULD ALSO HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN SLOVAKIA.

WEISER

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